

The 1952 Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival was opened September 27, 1952 with the colorful and historical ceremony of the BLESSING OF THE GRAPES with Father Alfredo Boeddecker, O.F.M. officiating. Below is the complete text of Father Boeddecker's remarks and the text of the blessing.

Sonoma! Valley of the Moon! What a beautiful name for a beautiful region -- one of the most attractive and most bountiful in our entire state.

We are now standing within sight of the Old Mission San Francisco de Solano, which is distinguished as the last and northernmost link in the long chain of California Missions. We are assembled in the Square -- the Plaza -- of what was once the pueblo of Sonoma and which is today the trading center of the entire valley. It is more than a city, it is a pleasant community, combining the charm and gracious living of the past with the busied progress of today.

The very air we breathe is charged with pent-up voices of the past. Long ago this countryside was spotted with Indian Scouts who were searching for a garden of beauty. They found this valley; and in the hush of its hills, they found peace and quiet. They lived here in heathen luxury...the summer sun was mild; the moonlight was a heaven-sent wonder that bathed the valley at night. The Moon seemed so close to this valley as to possess it as her very own. And so the Indians called it "Sonoma", The Valley of the Moon. Here they found Nature was kind to them: from the ground they collected roots; from the waters they caught fish; and in the hills they hunted game.

And then the Spaniards came: Don Francisco Castro, representing Governor Arguello. And with the Spaniards -- as always -- came the Padres: Fray Jose Altimira, representing the Great White Father in Heaven. Here he planted the Christian Cross, July 4th 1823. Here amid bounteous fresh springs, sheltered by these green hills, was founded the Mission of San Francisco Solano de Sonoma.

The Founding of Sonoma Mission -- apart from the obvious religious significance -- was a most important development in the history of California for two reasons. First, it limited the advance of the Russians who had already settled at Fort Ross some years previous. It is entirely possible -- that were it not for the founding of Sonoma Mission -- the Russian Colony might have been extended southward, and the entire history of our state and perhaps the world, would have been changed.

The Founding of Sonoma Mission, secondly, brought to this Valley, agriculture, and the seed of its future economic prosperity. The Padres at once took advantage of the rich soil. With their customary industry, they had water piped in from the crystalline springs. Grain was sown; cattle, sheep and swine were pastured. The fertile ground was tilled and the Padres fruti trees and vines for the grape, as was always their custom in the California Missions; for wheat and grapes were also needed for the Great Sacrament.

The grapes grew purple and luscious in the autumn sun, there beside the adobe walls of the Mission. Three thousand vines came into bearing and those vines marked the beginning of the present world-famous Sonoma vineyards. The Padres, with their Indian neophytes, proved to the world that the soil in the Valley of the Moon was ideal for grape growing. For in that earth had grown the madrone and manzanita, bay leaf and the laurel. These were to give the red wines of the Sonoma Hills a bouquet and color which were hard to equal.

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From early Spring until joyous harvest time, the Indians could be seen working in the vineyards, shoulder to shoulder with the Mission Padres. They planted the vine-cuttings which had been brought from Spain; they tilled and irrigated; they picked the grapes and trampled out the juice into cowhide bags. They let it ferment and grow strong with age.

Others came to copy the Indians. In 1845, Salvador Vallejo, the brother of the celebrated Don Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, planted the enormous vineyard known as Buena Vista. This was later purchased by the fabulous Colonel Agoston Haraszthy. The Colonel was an Hungarian nobleman and he brought with him from Europe the choicest cuttings from the finest grape vines in the old world. He planted those vines in the fields of this valley. It is no wonder that he has been rightfully called the "Father of the Modern California Wine Industry". Thanks to Colonel Haraszthy, and those experienced Italian-Swiss vintners and immigrants, Sonoma Valley wines have become internationally famous for their renowned quality.

This historical background is well known to most of you. And I need not dwell upon it at greater length. I stand here in the role, not of an historian, but of one invited to bless the grapes -- to thank God for His kind providence which has made this valley so fertile and productive.

Were it not for His creative wisdom and bounty to man, we would never have known the sweet fruit of the grape. Today men split the atom; they defy space; they conquer disease; they invent machinery that is almost human. But no man -- only God -- can make a grape!

The men who first planted the grape vines in this valley realized this. Their lives were dedicated to His service. They knew that grapes are not the products of men's minds but rather gifts from a Provident God. They saw in all nature, God's purpose: the sun to warm the earth; the earth to harbor the seed; the seed to produce the fruit; the fruit to give joy to man; and man to give glory to God.

These holy men of old, the Padres, did not waste time in trying to probe the mystery of how God made the grape. Instead, they thanked Him for His goodness in providing that delicious food and drink for man. In fact, they praised Him for all His great works of nature, as did their famous leader of long ago, St. Francis. They thanked Him for giving them Sister Moon to light their valley. They thanked Him for the peace and quiet He left them in these hills.....a joyful calm that sank deeply into their hearts and still today fills the heart of everyone who enters this valley.

Would that every atheist could come to this valley; every confused intellectual; every hater of men and sower of war -- could come here and learn again like children the simple story hidden in the grape. Our ancestors took it for granted; many of us have forgotten it; namely, that God is our Father -- no other. In His goodness He has given all earth to us to use and cultivate wisely for the betterment of the human race. We are then His children and brothers with one another. Children should love their Father; brothers should live together in peace and harmony, in a spirit of mutual cooperation and sincere affection.

The brown robe I wear is the same worn by that intrepid Apostle of California, Fray Junipero Serra; the same worn by the gentle Saint of Assisi, Francesco Bernardone. Both were men filled with a deep awareness of God's Providence, and the burning desire to bring His Peace to all men.

As a representative, then, of the early Padres, and as one who, I am sure, shares the sentiments of all of you, I recognize God's Supreme and Loving Providence over this Valley of the Moon. I do so by thanking Him now in public for His past bounty in the harvest of the grapes. And I ask Him to continue to bestow His blessings upon these fields, throughout the coming year. And may that same divine blessing, lingering over this valley and its vineyards like a gentle dew sink into your hearts to bear the rich fruits of love of God our Father and love of Men our brothers. "La Benediccion de Dios sea contigo."

THE BLESSING OF THE GRAPES

Bless O Lord, these new fruits of the vine, which you deigned to bring to maturity by the dew of the skies, by the abundance of rain, by warm and serene days and which you gave us to be used with thanksgiving for our welfare in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen

The first part of the report is devoted to a description of the work done during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the work done in the laboratory, and the second section deals with the work done in the field. The first section is divided into three parts: the first part deals with the work done in the laboratory, the second part deals with the work done in the field, and the third part deals with the work done in the laboratory. The second section is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the work done in the field, and the second part deals with the work done in the laboratory.

THE SECOND PART OF THE REPORT

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